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NSA review(s) completed.

12 February 1965

The Honorable McGeorge Bundy
 Special Assistant to the President
 for National Security Affairs
 The White House
 Washington, D. C.

Dear Mr. Bundy:

I would like to call your attention to the attached CIA memorandum which describes Chinese Communist military developments -- going back to 1963 -- related to the current crisis in Vietnam.

All of these developments have been under careful study for some time and the memo was in process of preparation here prior to the recent intensification of Viet Cong operations in South Vietnam.

Faithfully yours,

/s/

Marshall S. Carter
 Lieutenant General, USA
 Acting Director

Attachment:

OCI Special Report dated 12 Feb 65, Subject: Chinese Communists Brace for Possible Spread of Indochina War (OCI [redacted])

Identical letters sent to: The Honorable Llewellyn E. Thompson, The Honorable George W. Ball, The Honorable William Bundy, The Honorable Robert S. McNamara, The Honorable Cyrus R. Vance, The Honorable John T. McNaughton, General Earle G. Wheeler

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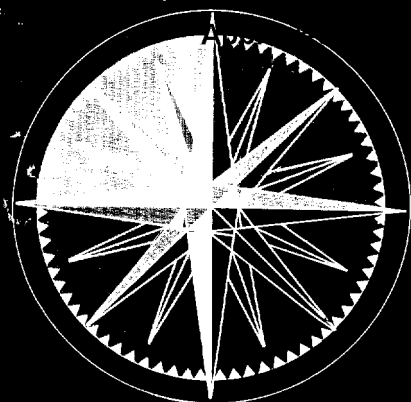
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Copy No. 493

SPECIAL REPORT

CHINESE COMMUNISTS BRACE FOR POSSIBLE SPREAD OF INDOCHINA WAR

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
OFFICE OF CURRENT INTELLIGENCE

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12 February 1965

CHINESE COMMUNISTS BRACE FOR POSSIBLE SPREAD OF INDOCHINA WAR

The steady build-up of Chinese Communist military strength in South China since mid-1964 strongly suggests that Peiping is preparing against the possibility that an expansion of the Indochina war may lead to direct Chinese involvement. Taken as a whole, Peiping's efforts to improve its capabilities appear defensive. There are no indications that the Chinese leaders intend to initiate new military action in Southeast Asia at this time, but it seems clear from their actions that they are determined to continue their encouragement and support for Communist insurgency. The Chinese preparations probably reflect concern that continued successes in South Vietnam will increase the danger of repeated and heavy US blows against North Vietnam (the DRV) or Communist China. This appears to be the sense of Foreign Minister Chen Yi's recent remarks [redacted] that the war was going well for the Communists but there was a possibility of US "fireworks" before final victory.

Peiping certainly hopes to avoid a direct confrontation with US forces, and the steps it has taken are probably calculated in part to back up threatening propaganda aimed at deterring the US from actions which would bring it face to face with Communist China. The Chinese are probably committed to respond in some fashion if there is an all-out US attack on the DRV, however, and would be unwilling to "stand idly by" in such a situation. Peiping's official statement of 9 February reaffirmed earlier promises to assist North Vietnam and asserted that the Chinese were "well prepared in this respect."

Planning for joint action designed to counter possible US moves probably began in earnest [redacted]

[redacted] in late June and early July 1964. Evidence of Chinese military preparations began to increase from that time on and the pace picked up after the Tonkin Gulf crisis in August 1964. Chinese actions include [redacted]

[redacted] improvement of air defenses and naval forces in South China, what may be a substantial enlargement of the armed forces, a militia build-up, and civil defense preparations.

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Early Military Planning

Joint planning for closer Chinese cooperation in defense of the DRV apparently began well over a year ago, probably as part of a long-range strategy involving a gradual build-up of Peiping's strength in South China to be ready for hostilities should the need arise. [redacted]

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MILITARY PREPARATIONS IN COMMUNIST CHINA

[redacted] No unusual military activity was noted in South China during or immediately after this period.

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Planning for measures to cope with possible US military moves took on a sudden urgency in the spring of 1964. Beginning in early May the US had made it clear to the Communist leaders in Peiping and Hanoi that the deteriorating situation in Laos and South Vietnam was a matter of vital and growing concern in Washington. The core of the US message was a warning that the Indochina war might be enlarged if the Communists did not ease their heavy pressure in Southeast Asia.

US threats of possible action against the DRV apparently aroused sharp concern in the Communist camp, and triggered

AUG 1964 Tonkin Gulf crisis; [redacted] first regiment of MIGs transferred to North Vietnam; jet fighter base activated at Nanning; new radar and air defense support personnel [redacted] moved to Sino-Vietnamese border

SEP 1964 Summer military conscription drive in full swing; [redacted] new naval base established on north shore of Tonkin Gulf.

OCT 1964 Second extraordinary military review held in 1964, also presided over by Mao Tse-tung; this was concerned with the militia buildup; construction began on Ningming airfield; Peitun airfield being improved.

NOV 1964 [redacted] Ssumao airfield being improved; air raid drills on Hainan Island.

DEC 1964 Second major conscription drive of 1964 under way; second regiment of MIGs transferred to North Vietnam; continuing

JAN 1965 Terms of service for military personnel extended by one year; indications that the Chinese may be assuming responsibility for air defense of North Vietnam.

[redacted] a special conference of the Chinese central committee held in conjunction with extraordinary military reviews on 16 and 17 June presided

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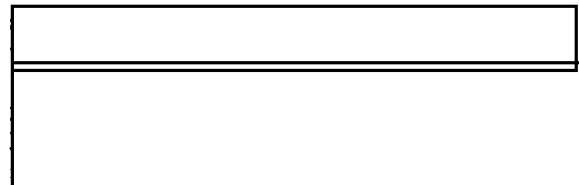


over by Mao Tse-tung himself
and attended by large numbers
of top military and party offi-
cials.

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Alarmed by US talk of carrying
the war north, Hanoi may have de-
manded new assurances of Chinese
military assistance in the event
of an attack--backed up by defi-
nite plans for action in such an
eventuality. The Vietnamese
probably also asked for a more
forthright public statement of
Peiping's intentions--aimed at

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detering the US from enlarging the conflict. This was forthcoming on 7 July in a formal statement by Chinese Foreign Minister Chen Yi putting the US on notice that any attack on North Vietnam carried grave risk of countermoves by Communist China.

Evidence of Peiping's determination to help defend the DRV, and indications of the extent to which Chinese moves in support of Hanoi had been prepared in advance began to appear following the Tonkin Gulf crisis in August. Official statements from Washington made it clear that this was a one-time reaction to a specific provocation, not the first phase of a major escalation. The incident demonstrated, however, that under some circumstances the US was willing to intervene directly by mounting limited attacks against the DRV.

The Air and Naval Build-up

Peiping's response to the employment of US air power against targets in the DRV was a blast of belligerent propaganda and a series of moves to strengthen air defenses in North Vietnam and South China. The speed of the reaction suggests that well-prepared contingency plans were being put into effect. The Chinese moved a regiment of jet fighters into North Vietnam's Phuc Yen Airfield in August and a second regiment in December. Fighter strength in South China has been more than doubled.

[redacted] jet fighters have been moved into the area since August,

raising the total deployed there [redacted] This build-up has included some MIG-19 (Farmer) and a few MIG-21 (Fishbed) jet fighters. Their transfer was accompanied by a substantial increase in radar installations and anti-aircraft artillery.

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Since October, an airfield suitable for use by tactical jet fighters has been under construction at Ningming, ten miles north of the Vietnamese border. This probably will be serviceable by this spring. [redacted]

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small airfield near the Laos border at Ssumao. There are indications that the 4,700-foot unpaved runway at this field is being improved. Another airfield, near the Burma border at Peitun, which can already accommodate jet fighters, is also being improved.

There are increasing indications that the Chinese may intend to use their growing air strength in the area to defend North Vietnam, as well as South China. [redacted]

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for North Vietnam under some circumstances.

Peiping's South China Fleet has increased its capability in the Tonkin Gulf since August.

[REDACTED] and a small naval facility was established in the Peihai area on the north shore of the Tonkin Gulf. Although the South Sea Fleet has no major naval vessels, it has numerous patrol craft and motor torpedo boats which could constitute a limited threat to US naval operations in the Tonkin Gulf.

Expansion of the Army

There are some indications that the Chinese Communists have decided to expand their already large armed forces. Two large-scale conscription drives and a recent extension of military tours of duty may have had the net effect of expanding these forces from about 2.5 million to more than 3 million.

The first conscription drive took place from July to October, [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] This appeared at the time to be merely a repetition of the annual summer conscriptions of the previous three years. From 1955 to 1959, the army had recruited and demobilized during the winter to coincide with the farming cycle, as most inductees were from rural areas. Because peasant recruits had fewer skills and had become less reliable during the disaster

years of 1959-60, recruiting shifted largely to an urban base in 1961. While no solid figures on the summer recruitment target for 1964 have been made known, [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] would indicate a total national goal of about 700,000, which would be in line with normal annual quotas.

In December 1964, [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] a second nationwide conscription drive was under way. Many of the recruits were being drawn from areas that presumably had already supplied their annual quota in the summer. This is the first time that a major winter drive has been noted since 1959 and the first time that two heavy drives are known to have taken place in one calendar year. Although figures for either conscription or demobilization are lacking, the total number of recruits over the past year would seem to have been greater than the normal annual quota.

On 19 January, Peiping decreed a one-year extension of the terms of service for the army, air force, and navy to four, five, and six years, respectively. This order presumably halts the demobilization which has been going on concurrently with the second conscription drive. The net effect of retaining most of those who would normally be demobilized at this time and the two subscription drives last year would be to increase the size of the armed forces by a substantial

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CHINESE PEOPLE'S MILITIA PASSING IN REVIEW

number. Another effect of the mandatory extension of tours, of special importance to heightened military preparedness, is that the army will be able to retain its best-trained troops for an additional year. At the same time, the proportion of raw recruits in the service at any one time will be reduced. In fact, the proportion should be significantly lower this year, because the militia, from which the army draws most recruits, has greatly stepped up its pre-induction basic infantry training.

Militia Build-up

At the same time that the regular military forces apparently have been quietly expanded, a major build-up of the civilian

People's Militia has been taking place under the full glare of propaganda. From a claimed peak of 230 million during the Great Leap Forward, the militia collapsed and was all but disbanded in 1960, and militia activity remained limited even through early 1964. With the general hardening of the regime's policies in June, however, recruiting and training of militiamen was suddenly stepped up. By now, according to tenuous indications, the militia may have regained a strength on the order of 20-30 million. Current training covers most basic military skills, including the use of live ammunition on a large scale for the first time in four years.

Peiping intends to use the militia partly as a new tool for controlling domestic dissidence, particularly in conjunction with the intensifying "socialist education" campaign. Nevertheless, Peiping has also played up the militia's potential as a defensive reserve which can release regular troops for duty elsewhere. Despite the regime's hopes, however, it is questionable whether a trustworthy militia force can be organized on a large scale.

Civil Defense Preparations

For the first time in several years, indications of civil defense preparations in South China have begun to appear. On Hainan Island, [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] air raid trenches were being dug and air raid drills conducted.

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[REDACTED]

There is evidence that local government units on the South China border with Laos and Vietnam have been preparing contingency war evacuation plans.

The Immediate Future

Taken as a whole, the Chinese Communists' effort to strengthen their armed forces in general, and particularly to improve their air and naval capability in the region near the Sino-Vietnamese border, appears defensive. Peiping seems to be preparing to ward off blows which it fears may fall, rather than getting ready to launch a massive offensive thrust designed to finish off the war quickly. At the same time, Peiping hopes that its actions backing up its bellicose propaganda will serve to deter the US from any escalation of the war.

The Chinese appear confident that the months ahead will bring new successes in the struggle by the Viet Cong to wrest control over the countryside in South Vietnam from the government in Saigon and eventually to establish a neutralist regime which would insist on a US withdrawal from the area. Peiping is probably equally well pleased by the situation in Laos, where Communist forces have been able

to maintain a dominant position despite the additional air support provided for the armies of Souvanna Phouma.

The [REDACTED] optimism about developments in Southeast Asia shown by Chinese Foreign Minister Chen Yi [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] is in part psychological warfare, but it probably reflects the general lines of Peiping's estimate concerning the trend of events.

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[REDACTED] As for Laos, American support would be withdrawn after the game was played out in South Vietnam and the Laotians would be forced to reach agreement among themselves.

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Peiping's propaganda paints the US situation in Southeast Asia as increasingly desperate. Although some of the Chinese leaders doubtless realize that this picture of a swelling tide of Communist victory is overdrawn, they are probably to some extent bemused by their own invention. Chou En-lai's intemperate sneers at the feebleness of "imperialism" [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] suggest such a mood of confidence. The Chinese premier scoffed at defensive military preparations by the UK against Indonesia and declared that although the US "paper tiger is baring its fangs and showing its claws," the Chinese people regard

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it as "quite miserable and ludicrous."

Despite this bold talk, Peiping's preparations for defense indicate continued respect for US power directly applied in the field. The Chinese may well despise the US "strategically," heavily discounting the possibility of an all-out attack against China, but are getting ready to cope with stepped up "tactical" thrusts against the DRV. Their emphasis on air defense and the build-up of

naval capability indicates the kind of limited US action they regard as most likely. The recent moves to increase the overall strength of their ground forces during the next six months or so are probably insurances against an all-out US attack which the Chinese accept as possible but do not think is very likely.

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